DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 968 EA 026 858

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TITLE The Contribution of Quality Assurance Reviews to Development in School Systems. Draft.
INSTITUTION New South Wales Dept. of School Education, Sydney (Australia).
PUB DATE Dec 92
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Institutional Evaluation; Organizational Development; *School Effectiveness; Self Evaluation (Groups); Total Quality Management
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (New South Wales); *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses key aspects of the British experience with school review and evaluation, which influenced the development of the South Australian framework for school evaluation. The discussion combines the requirements of accountability and development within a framework of quality assurance. The paper describes shortcomings of the internal review (self-evaluation) process and the HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectors) external assessments for schools in the United Kingdom. School review systems have a dual focus--accountability and development. Internal approaches have traditionally been directed at development, and external approaches have tended to focus on accountability. In response to deficiencies of the internal and external approaches used in Great Britain, the former Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) developed an internal-external school-review plan, which also experienced implementation problems. Since 1989, South Australian schools have been required to develop school-development plans (SDPs), which schools use in conducting annual internal reviews of their planning and development. Studies have indicated that schools often needed assistance in implementing plans. A combination of external and internal review is recommended. Internal school reviews should be essentially formative, identifying the fundamental processes and organizational structures most important to student learning. External reviews should be summative, be conducted every 3 years, evaluate performance of the system as a whole, and provide comparative information to schools. One figure is included. (LMI)

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEWS TO DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

ED 384 968

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The Contribution of Quality Assurance Reviews to Development in School Systems

Introduction

The accountability and improvement of education has been an issue on the political agenda for most of the last two decades. Partly in response to this schools and school systems have developed a range of approaches to review and improve their performance. These have been referred to under the rubric of school improvement programs, school development plans, school–based review and self–evaluation, and more recently, quality assurance and external review. These approaches all have one overriding aim, the improvement of the process of schooling and the raising of educational standards, but they derive from different traditions. The main developments in the 1970s and early 1980s were 'school improvement' programs, which derive originally from attempts to rejuvenate inner city schools in the USA and school–based review and self–evaluation which was a response from pressures for schools in various countries to be more accountable (Hopkins, 1985). External review approaches have their heritage in the British Schools Inspectorate, although there are now clear differences between the 'inspection' focus of UK school inspection methodologies and the 'quality assurance' orientation which characterises recent developments in South Australia and New Zealand (Cuttance, 1992a).

Although school improvement programs could be treated as a particular type of activity under school–based review it is useful to treat them as different because the international literature for each has tended to ignore the other (Reynolds, 1992). The school effectiveness and school improvement literature is reviewed in Cuttance (1986), Levine (1992), Murphy (1992) and Reynolds (1992). Hopkins (1985) reviewed the school–based review and self–evaluation literature. The present paper discusses key aspects of the experience with school review and evaluation in Britain that were important in the development of the framework for school review and development in South Australia. The discussion brings together the requirements of accountability and development within a framework of quality assurance.

The use of school–based reviews in Britain focussed on the adoption by individual schools of self–evaluation schemes. In addition to this being a response to the perceived pressures for greater accountability, it was also a reflection of the growing professionalism of teachers.[1] In contrast to these internal[2] approaches to review and

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1 See Nuttall (1981) for further discussion of this point.

2 The term 'internal' is used here to describe approaches to review and evaluation that are controlled and initiated by schools themselves, and the term 'external' is used to refer to approaches in which all stakeholders have some say in the way the review or evaluation is conducted.

evaluation, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) have provided the main paradigm for *external* reviews and evaluations of schools.[3]

The systems of self–evaluation that were introduced in schools in the UK had certain weaknesses which were responsible for their failure to operate in the way that their proponents had initially expected. One of the reasons for school self–evaluation not working in the ways that were expected of it is the heavy demands that it makes on teachers' time. Another problem has been the lack of in–service training in the skills necessary to carry out analytical evaluations and reviews of school performance. In addition, school self–evaluation has been viewed in many cases as a process that involved only the teachers in a school, because it has been orientated towards the professional development needs of teachers. Its exclusion of other parties to schooling from the review process (pupils, parents, school counsellors, administrators, etc) has meant that it has not satisfied external demands for accountability. Further, the strong focus of reviews and self–evaluations on professional development has tended to detract from the overall objective of improving schools, because the findings of reviews have not been translated into the appropriate action plans required for school development, or because of a lack of success in managing the process of change (Hopkins, 1989; Clift, 1987).

Internal School Reviews

The UK experience

Hopkins (1989) provided a prescriptive statement of the main characteristics of successful schemes of internal school–based review:

- they are based on a systematic review and evaluation process, and are not simply an exercise in reflection
- their immediate goal is to obtain information about a schools' condition, purposes, and products
- they are meant to lead to action on an aspect of the schools' organisation or curriculum
- they are a group activity that involves participants in a collegial process
- optimally the process is 'owned' by the school
- their purpose is school improvement and development, and their aspiration is to progress towards the ideal goal of a 'problem solving' or 'relatively autonomous' school.

This list of characteristics has benefited from hindsight gained through the evaluation of school–based review schemes over the last decade. In reality, few schemes have conformed to this idealised set of characteristics, partly because there has been

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3 The function of the Inspectorate in the UK is to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and not, as in some systems, the inspection of teachers for accreditation and promotion purposes.

considerable variation in purpose among the schemes that have been in use. Following from this variation in purpose there has been variation in the way that schemes have been implemented. Figure 1 lists a series of questions that were developed out of the experiences of those involved in a group of school–based review projects. These questions address the key evaluation issues for school reviews: context (who were they for, and what were the objectives?), process (the way the scheme is carried out), reporting (who reports?, to whom?, how are reports validated?, how do they relate to external agencies?), and action that should follow from the review (how is change to be implemented and managed?).

The Guidelines for Review and Internal Development in Schools (GRIDS) scheme was one of the most common UK approaches to school self–evaluation. This approach was intended for the 'whole school' rather than for individual teachers or small groups (McMahon et *al*, 1984). However, this was not meant to imply that schools should tackle all issues simultaneously. The advice was to select one or two areas for development and focus on these before evaluating the process and moving on to new priority areas.

Another scheme of school–based review and evaluation was the Institutional Development Programme. This scheme used a questionnaire survey to help diagnose problems affecting institutional functioning and performance.[4] The feedback of the information from the questionnaire to schools is employed as a strategy to generate a process of goal setting, planning, and action. The assistance of a consultant is considered to be important in the process of interpreting the responses to the questionnaire and in assisting the school to establish its development plan. Various other schemes that use standardised schedules of items to assess school functioning and process are reviewed in Hopkins (1989).

Figure 1 Questions to be asked in relation to school self–evaluation (from Nuttall, 1981)

Questions about context

- Who or what is the scheme for? Who is examining what and reporting it to whom?
- What balance is intended between professional development and rendering account?
- Who has taken the initiative?
- Is it to be mandatory?
- Who is to control the process? Is it specified in detail?
- Are the lines of communication and consultation such that the process of evaluation will be fully understood by all involved?
- Is it potentially threatening to schools, or teachers?

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4 The questionnaire covers aspects of values and goals, school objectives, staff relationships, school climate, leadership and management, decision making, communications, assessment and evaluation, teaching methods, and teacher activities (Dalin and Rust, 1983).

Questions about process

- Is it economical in terms of time and resources?
- Who is to be involved, both inside and outside the school, and what is their sense of involvement?
- What supports, skills or other resources will be available?
- How is trust being ensured or developed?
- What is the focus of attention of the evaluation?
- What methods, instruments or techniques are to be employed?
- Over what period of time will the scheme be conducted?
- How will the program be sustained?
- How frequently will it occur?

Questions about reporting

- What guidance will be given in drafting the report?
- Who drafts the report? Who authorises the final draft? What are the stages in this process?
- Who receives the report?
- What is the style of the report? Descriptive or judgemental; bland or blunt; what format; length; what tone; etc?
- Are individuals to be named or otherwise identified?
- Is the report to be validated? If so, by whom and at what stage? Will this validation be recorded and reported?
- What part will the public media be expected to play?

Questions about action

- Is implementation built in to the process?
- Are Advisors to be involved in implementation?
- How will implementation be managed?
- Is it expected that implementation will be continuous, part of a cyclical process of evaluation, planning, and action?

How successful has internal school review been?

Part of the failing of school–based internal self–evaluation and review schemes stems from changes in the prevailing view of the management of education. When school–based review schemes were introduced in the late 1970s the administrative orientation towards the conduct of public sector organisations was predominantly one in which accountability was referenced by the standards and traditions of professional institutions. Thus, school–based reviews invested primary responsibility for the development of schools in the professionals who were involved in schooling. However, even then there was concern that schooling was an activity that is directly funded by the treasury, and that this public responsibility required some additional form of formal accountability.

This tension between public and professional accountability is apparent in several of the questions that were displayed in figure 1. Nuttall summed up the situation with respect to school self–evaluation schemes:

> "Accountability and professional development are therefore not necessarily incompatible, but admittedly the tide is not running in favour of accountability procedures which appear to exclude the public or its representatives. Then, assuming that formal account has to be rendered to parents, governors and/or LEA, is there still a way that the exercise [of self–evaluation] can also be one that generates professional development?" (1981, p23)

Since that time the prevailing view has strengthened in terms of the requirement for schools, and other public sector organisations, to provide evidence that they are accountable for their activities. This, however, need not result in a weakening of the accountability of schools to professional standards and traditions. Indeed, paradoxically as it may seem, the more 'market' oriented the school system becomes, the weaker the argument for direct control through accountability mechanisms emanating solely from the treasury. The increased demand for accountability is not so much to the public as electors, and therefore providers of funds, but as the consumer of the services offered by schools.

The major problem with school–based reviews in the UK was their failure to construct analytically critical reviews and evaluations of the process of schooling (Clift, 1987; Hopkins, 1989; Hargreaves, 1988). Evaluations tended to be defensive and often did not tackle issues central to the process of learning and teaching critically (Hargreaves, 1988). In addition, the development that should follow an evaluation was often not been managed successfully, and often did not resulted in the intended improvements (Hargreaves, 1988).

There are various reasons for these failures. Successful change in social organisations through a process of review, development and evaluation requires a high level of complex skills and management. It requires motivation (Clift, 1987) and access to training in skills of evaluation and the management of change (Clift, 1987; Hopkins, 1989). The significant investment of time required for successful school development means that all the participants must have a strong commitment to the changes needed, and be prepared to divert time and energy from other activities into the various phases of the program (Hopkins, 1989). The lack of experience in planned change and in managing the commitment and time required to redeploy resources have also been significant reasons for the failure of school self–evaluation systems to lead to successful school development (Clift, 1987).

Other failings of school–based reviews have been:

- they have rarely involved all stakeholders – their focus has often been that of professional development for school staff, therefore pupils, parents, school councillors, community members, administrators have not always been included in the review process
- they have tended to be too time consuming and exhausting of the energies of those involved
- they have often attempted to be all encompassing and have tackled too large a task
- the period between reviews has often been too long to make a timely and significant impact on the development process in schools.

In addition, the programs of change and development which have followed from such reviews have tended to fail because:

- of the substantial investment of time required and the high level of motivation necessary in order to translate review recommendations into development processes
- the participants have not had access to the requisite skills for managing and monitoring the change process, and this has resulted in
  - the change and development process not being tailored to the resources available
  - a failure to analyse and source the appropriate resources to successfully carry out the change process.

In the systems where school–based review has been institutionalised in an attempt to establish systemwide evaluation it has tended to fail in all but the most committed schools. This has meant that it has been difficult in a school–based system of review to obtain the information necessary to assess the performance of the system as a whole, and to develop and implement change strategies in the weaker schools. For this reason there has been a strong move towards the incorporation of at least some elements of external review in system-wide review structures. In some cases these review structures are entirely external to schools, but in others they have resulted in a combined internal–external review system.

External School Review

HMI inspections of schools are the foremost example of *external* assessment of whether a school is performing at acceptable levels in terms of professional standards. However, the traditional inspection program is not as well suited to the demands of development as it is to those of accountability.

In recent years HMI have carried out a series of survey reviews through short visits to gather information on particular aspects of schooling. These exercises have provided the basis for national reports on the condition of certain aspects of schooling (eg. Department of Education and Science, 1979, 1982, 1985). The number of schools visited in any one year is relatively few in number, and the system as it stands at present is not suitable as a basis for regular and timely reporting on every school.

In terms of its potential contribution to school development, another problem with the traditional Inspectorate system is the length of the reporting cycle. The relatively long time lag between the inspection and the report back to schools makes it unsuitable as a basis for school development programs. Further, the Inspectorate system has not provided an adequate basis for locating the under performing schools in the system.[5]

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5 The last Conservative Government in the UK introduced legislation to radically change the role of HMI. The legislation proposes that schools will now be reviewed every four years, with an increased emphasis on quality assurance and standards.

In brief the HMI approach has certain weaknesses in terms of current thinking on the purposes for reviewing schools:

- it provides for only a sparse sampling of schools
- it is very labour intensive and expensive
- it generally does not provide sufficient overview information on the performance of the system as a whole – although the system of shorter reviews which were introduced have done much to address this issue
- it has been criticised for not being sufficiently explicit about the criteria for reviewing schools
- the length of the reporting cycle and of the review process itself is not conducive to making a significant contribution to school development
- it does not systematically locate the under performing schools in the system or those whose performance is declining.

Combined internal–external review systems

The former Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) attempted to overcome the weakness of the self–evaluation approach and of external review methods while building on their strengths in developing a new system of school review and development. In particular, the ILEA set out to:

- explicitly link the review process to development processes within schools
- involve all stakeholders in both the review and development process
- revise the role of inspectors and advisors in the review process to provide schools with a more substantial stake in the ownership of the review
  - inspectors and advisors were employed to assist principally in areas in which schools felt that they did not have all the necessary skills and knowledge – particularly in relation to subject reviews in secondary schools
- provide a clear statement of the objectives for individual reviews.

The ILEA system was based on quinquennial reviews of schools, and it contained a significant school–directed component. As with most school self–evaluation schemes this was principally in the hands of school heads and their senior staff. Principals were expected to do most of the monitoring and assessment and suggest future developments for their schools. The Inspectorate role was to assist schools in the review process, to either endorse the development proposals or supplement school's own findings, and to assist them to achieve the objectives set out in the development proposals.

The role of the Inspectorate was found to be valuable in the review phase, especially when it addressed inadequacies in the school's own self-report. But such co-ordination between the various parties was not always the case. Because of the differences in time frame between Inspectorate visits and a school's self-evaluation timetable, there was often a lack of integration between the contributions of the Inspectorate and schools to the review process.

The main area of failing in relation to the Inspectorate role, however, appears to have been in the contribution of the subject inspectors.[6] Although the main role of subject inspectors was to validate the self–evaluation reports from subject departments, there was confusion about their involvement in supporting the review process itself. The subject inspectors tended to see the school's needs through the lens of their own subject and, as a consequence, their reports and contributions to reviews were not always in line with those of general inspectors, who had a 'whole–school' remit. After some time the subject inspectors' remit was withdrawn.

There were also structural problems with the coherency and co–ordination of the review process. The guidelines were not internally consistent and schools tended to select the elements that suited their preference at the time. Further, the five–year period between major evaluation exercises in each school was found to be too long to provide support to a process of continuous development. This failing would have been alleviated if the original proposals for quinquennial reviews to be supplemented by brief annual reviews in the intervening period had been implemented.

In addition to the above problems, the quinquennial review system continued to suffer from some of the significant failings of earlier school self–evaluation approaches. The ILEA's own review of the quinquennial review system found that:

- it failed to consistently involve all the relevant stakeholders in the review process
- the reports from the school self–evaluation component were often too long and descriptive, lacked critical self–assessment, and were open to the challenge of self–justification
- the reports from schools rarely tackled the quality of learning in classrooms.

In addition, the review found that:

- little provision was made for training in evaluative skills
- the validation of school self–evaluation reports by the Inspectorate did not act as a corrective to the failings of the school's contributions
- the process often failed to evaluate the working relationships of schools with external agencies, such as, welfare and special education services
- the review process did not provide the systemic information required for the system's management to adjust ongoing policy implementation and develop new policy in response to emerging issues.

The ILEA revised its system of internal–external reviews to provide for a stronger assessment role for the Inspectorate and introduced a new system of Inspectors Based in Schools to assist development in the weaker schools. Further, the review cycle was revamped to provide a sharper focus and a major review in each school every three years.

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6 This section draws on internal ILEA documents which reported reviews of the quinquennial review system.

School and System Development

As discussed earlier, review systems have a dual focus: accountability and development. Internal review approaches have traditionally been directed more at development and external review approaches have tended to have a sharper accountability focus. The combined internal–external approach developed by the ILEA explicitly attempted to marry the requirements of accountability and development. It did this by building a collaborative review process on the foundation of school development plans.

Lessons from earlier attempts at school development and change

The idea of the development of schools as organisations themselves derives from earlier work in the field of professional development. School–based professional development activities in the 1970s led to a realisation that the development of individuals depends upon the health of the organisation in which they work. This led to the conceptualisation of organisations themselves as being capable of development.

In North America, research–led school improvement programs emerged during the 1970s. Although the lack of a rigorous review component in these programs was evident, a substantial body of research literature indicates that certain factors in the development of schools as organisations are important for their success.

A recent review of this literature by Levine and Lezotte (1990) found that the most consistent correlates of effective schools are:

- Productive school climate and culture
  - orderly environment
  - staff commitment to a shared and articulated mission focused on achievement
  - problem–solving orientation
  - staff cohesion, collaboration, consensus, communications and collegiality
  - staff input into decision–making
  - school–wide emphasis on recognizing positive performance.

- Focus on student acquisition of central learning skills
  - maximum availability and use of time for learning
  - emphasis on mastery of central learning skills.
- Appropriate monitoring of student progress.
- Practice–oriented staff development at the school site.
- Outstanding leadership
  - vigorous selection and replacement of teachers
  - maverick orientation and buffering
  - frequent, personal monitoring of school activities, and sense–making
  - high expenditure of time and energy for school improvement actions
  - support for teachers
  - acquisition of resources
  - superior instructional leadership

  - availability and effective utilization of instructional support personnel.
- Salient parent involvement.
- Effective instructional arrangements and implementation
  - successful grouping and related organizational arrangements
  - appropriate pacing and alignment
  - active/enriched learning
  - effective teaching practices
  - emphasis on higher–order learning in assessing instructional outcomes
  - co-ordination in curriculum and instruction
  - easy availability of abundant, appropriate instructional materials
  - classroom adaptation
  - stealing time for reading, language and maths.
- High operationalised expectations and requirements for students.
- Other possible correlates
  - student sense of efficacy/futility
  - multi–cultural instruction and sensitivity
  - personal development of students
  - rigorous and equitable student promotions policies and practices.

Another important feature of most successful school improvement programs has been their focus on a limited number of change strategies at any one time (Levine, 1992). The concept of focused change as encapsulated in more recent proposals for *school development plans* takes on board several lessons from school improvement programs (Department of Education and Science, 1989, 1991; Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991; Hopkins, 1989). It also provides an interface to the best features of both the internal and external review systems which emerged during the last decade or so.

Systemic change

Schools are only one component part of education systems. The performance of schools is dependant upon the support and the materials that is delivered to them by other parts of the system. Schools are responsible for the performance of individual programs and policies within the resource constraints and support that is provided to them.

The structure of relationships between the various levels in the system is sometimes referred to as *nested*. The activities of the operational directorates are nested within the framework of policies and programs provided by central directorates and systemic functions. The operation of schools is nested within the structure provided by regional directorates. This makes it clear that the performance of the system as a whole is dependant upon the articulation of support structures between the various organisational levels of the system. For the system to be maximally effective, support for the delivery of a program or policy to schools must be cumulative through each level of the organisation. Therefore, the support structure for schools must be an integral component in the review of systemic performance.

The support structure for schools consists of at least three parts. The first component is the curriculum and other materials which are developed for each program or policy. The second is the allocation of resources to support the programs and policies implemented in schools. The third is training and development in the required skills within schools for the implementation of particular programs and policies in the teacher–learning context. All three parts of this delivery system must be well co-ordinated to maximise the effectiveness of programs and policies for student learning.

Change in successful organisations

The research by Peters and Waterman on America's best–run companies found that certain attributes characterised development and change in the most successful of them. These attributes have since been described as applicable to schools as follows.

- Commitment
  - The collective staff agreed behaviours and outcomes are sufficiently specific to control the behaviours of veteran members and integrate new members into the organisation.
- Expectations
  - Successful schools are staffed by confident teachers who expect others to perform to their level of quality. Students also know what they are expected to achieve.
- Action
  - Successful schools have a bias for action and a sense of opportunism. Challenges are promoted and strengths are exploited.
- Leadership
  - Effective schools promote primary work groups and the talents of their staff. Leaders emerge at all levels of the system to create an environment that supports experimentation and innovation.
- Focus
  - Effective schools pay close attention to their learning–based tasks. Classroom time is targetted towards academic learning and teachers strive to maximise the engagement of students in learning activities. Staff development activities focus on instructional skills and understandings.
- Climate
  - Successful schools maintain an orderly and safe environment for staff and students. They are good places to work and stimulating learning environments for all participants in the education process.
- Slack
  - Successful schools have a reasonable level of human resources and are able to organise their activities and schedules to create some slack time. There is time for staff to participate in developmental activities and to incorporate new practices into their busy schedules. Challenges are valued and there is a tolerance of failure arising from experimentation and innovation.

The research on successful organisations has found that success depends on the interaction between process and organisational factors. Organisational–structural factors

are a pre-requisite for success – they provide the framework for change. Process factors empower innovations and provide the drive required to make change happen.

School development in South Australia

Strategic development plans have now become commonplace in many school systems. They have been introduced in most Australian state systems over the last three years or so and are also being widely introduced in the UK. The discussion below focuses on the purposes and form of these plans, known as school development plans, in South Australia. The developments elsewhere are broadly similar, although there are also interesting variations from system to system.

The introduction of school development plans (SDPs) in South Australia was announced in 1989. SDPs are the focus of a substantial part of the review activity of the Education Review Unit. All schools are expected to have a SDP that sets out their proposed development for the next three years. This plan is rolled forward each year after an internal review of the progress that has been made in terms of its stated objectives and outcomes. That is, each school undertakes an annual internal review of its planning and development. To facilitate these internal reviews the outcomes indicated in the SDP should be stated in a way which allows them to be verified without the need to go to a great deal of effort to investigate whether or not they have been achieved.

SDPs are set within the context of a school's statement of purpose, or vision statement. They provide a statement of how the school is attempting to address the overarching goals contained in their statement of purpose. SDPs must encompass the core of the development and change activity in schools. Therefore, they must incorporate all of the major changes and developments which a school wishes to undertake during the life of the plan. However, SDPs should omit the day-to-day maintenance activities that are not part of the core development activity. The major themes for change and development in schools arise from two sources. First, there are the programs and policies which the government of the day wishes to implement in schools. Second, there are areas of change and development which emanate directly from the needs and aspirations of school communities.

Schools are encouraged to limit the number of major themes of change that they address simultaneously. Experience with successful organisational change suggests that only a small number of major changes can be satisfactorily undertaken simultaneously. Although it is often tempting to view half a dozen objectives as being a relatively small task to manage, these objectives give rise to a larger number of strategies which must all be handled simultaneously. It is at this operational, or action, level that many of the difficulties in controlling change are experienced.

In large schools with more complex organisational structures it is also necessary to develop *action plans* at the faculty, or sub–school, level. In this situation the number of change strategies which are being actioned simultaneously can be quite large. For example, if there are six objectives being addressed in a particular year of the SDP and these are implemented through three strategies each, then the school will be

simultaneously actioning eighteen change strategies. This will expand out further if several curriculum departments or sub-schools then develop their own action plans. The number of simultaneous change strategies that are in effect at any one time could be as high as about fifty. In small schools the action plan required to operationalise the change strategies may be integrated directly into the SDP. That is, the SDP itself may spell-out the action plan strategies.

The strategies which schools specify in their SDP are the driving force through which innovation is introduced into the system. They provide the basis on which professional practice is developed in the context of a systemic framework for schooling. The ownership of the change process itself, through the choice of strategies chosen to implement changes, must rest squarely with the professional staff of schools and the partnerships which they have with their communities.

The action plans which schools develop in order to implement their change strategies are easier to monitor if the school also establishes a set of performance or success indicators to indicate whether or not the change strategy has been implemented and produced the desired effect. Thus, performance indicators in this context should be related directly to the individual action strategies which the school is using to implement change. These action plans require that individual teachers address the particular actions necessary to implement development in the school. One of the pervasive problems in many earlier attempts at school change, particularly in the context of school–based self–evaluation exercises, was confusion over whether it was necessary for teachers to individually and consistently implement the action strategies agreed in schools.

In South Australia the introduction of school development plans and the establishment of the review program, that is both internal and external review, took place over a two year period. Regional directors were responsible for the approval of each school's plan, and all schools were expected to have had their SDPs approval by the end of the first year. The approval of school development plans was based upon an assessment of whether or not the plan met published guidelines. These guidelines dealt essentially with the form of objectives, strategies and outcomes expected in SDPs. Further, the approval process briefly assessed the appropriateness of the process used to develop the plan.

The Education Department provided guidelines which indicated a number of basic principles for developing a plan (Education Department of South Australia, 1990). They indicated that plans should:

- be based on consideration of the expressed needs and priorities of students, the parent community and school staff
- provide opportunities for students, parents and school staff to participate in planning and decision making
- be economical in terms of time, energy, resources and outcomes
- take full account of system priorities.

The guidelines reaffirmed that principals as managers of schools were formally responsible for development in their schools and therefore should ensure that the school community is prepared for and actively involved in school development planning.

Principals were encouraged to consider the processes necessary for staff, parents, students and school councils to work towards:

- the establishment of agreed priorities for school development
- translating these priorities for development into objectives and strategies to achieve specific outcomes for student learning.

The appropriateness of the level of performance that a school is expected to aim for depends upon both the context of the school and its prevailing level or stage of development. That is, schools are expected to make progress according to where they are at the time, given their circumstances. This allows all schools to maximise the advantage to be gained from planning and to set their plans according to the particular context in which their development is taking place. The primary consideration is not the level of performance of other schools, but rather the appropriate rate of progress for an individual school. Individual schools are expected to set themselves targets that stretch their capacity, but nevertheless targets which are achievable.

The effectiveness of implementation

A review of support for school development planning conducted a year after its introduction in South Australia found that "most schools had successfully formulated a plan but require[d] support and assistance . . . to ensure that:

- the plan identifies and prioritises school needs and system priorities
- it clearly identifies outcomes for students
- action plans that involve and commit all staff to a range of practices to improve student learning are drawn up
- the school community can define indicators of the outcomes to be achieved
- monitoring and review processes to assist the implementation of the plan and sustain ongoing development are in place
- all groups in the school community—school management, teachers, ancillary staff, students, parents and the school council—are involved and have a commitment to the ongoing development of their school." (Education Department of South Australia, 1991, p26)

The review found that at that time schools could be identified as being at one of four stages in their development planning.

Stage 1

Some commitment to school development planning by the principal and staff, but with minimal involvement of parents and students. Schools in this stage tended to have limited decision making procedures and communication structures. The school had a development plan which required further work to clarify objectives, strategies and intended outcomes.

None of the principals surveyed considered their school to be at this stage. However, the school reviews conducted during the year found that a significant proportion of schools were experiencing difficulties with fundamental aspects of school

development planning. Either, schools in the survey at the end of the year had overcome these difficulties and made sufficient progress to move beyond this stage of development, or they have tended to over–estimate their progress in establishing effective development planning.

Stage 2

The school had a development plan which indicated objectives, strategies and outcomes. Further work was required to develop an action plan which took into account the specific roles of staff, students and parents in implementing the plan. The action plan did not indicate when things were to be done, how they were to be done, the resources required or include indicators of success.

Principals of schools at stage 2 appeared to gain more from workshops than cluster meetings. They were least likely of all principals to attend cluster meetings. Thirty three percent of the schools surveyed indicated that they were at this stage.

Stage 3

The school had a development plan and action plans, and was progressing with the implementation of the strategies in the plan. All groups in the school community had been involved in the development of the plan—although some to only a very limited extent. There was limited monitoring of the plan to ensure that the strategies were achieving the planned outcomes.

Principals of schools at stage 3 indicated that they gained most from sharing ideas with other principals through cluster meetings or district groups. Forty five percent of the schools surveyed indicated that they were at this stage.

Stage 4

The school had a well constructed development plan and effective action plans and monitoring processes. The school had conducted an internal review to assess the success of each objective and rolled the plan forward to provide a new three year horizon for school development. All groups in the school community had been involved to some extent in the school development process.

Twenty two percent of schools surveyed indicated that they were at this stage.

Principals of schools in stage 4 were more likely to indicate that they made effective use of the full range of options available to them for supporting school development. Principals in these schools made effective use of resources available to them from within the region as well as those available centrally, in addition to services available from outside the system.

Education Review Unit external reviews conducted during the last term of the year found that 76 percent of schools had reached, or with assistance from normal support services, would be able to establish the structures and processes necessary for sustainable development. Schools assessed as having already attained, or in the near

future were expected to attain, a state of sustainable development had reached stage 3 or 4 in the above classification.

The reviews in the last term of the year found that 24 percent of schools had not established the structures and processes necessary for sustainable development. Such schools were still at stage 1 or 2 in the above classification.

External reviews of 203 schools were conducted during the year following the above review of the implementation of SDPs. The reviews assessed the planning and management processes associated with the development and implementation of school development plans, and the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by schools to achieve their particular objectives. They found that 36 percent of the schools reviewed were well advanced in school development planning and were able to effectively manage and sustain their own development. A further thirty nine percent were likely to be able to establish the necessary structures and processes for sustainable development with the normal assistance and support provided by regional and system programs. Nineteen percent were assessed as requiring early and continuing support to establish the necessary structures and processes for sustainable development. Six percent of the schools reviewed required substantial support over a prolonged period in order to establish the structures and processes for sustainable development. Significant leadership and organisational change was thought to be necessary for effective development in this latter group of schools.

Discussion

The school self–evaluation approaches that were introduced over the last two decades had shortcomings which hindered the realisation of the aspirations that were held for them. Where they were used voluntarily or by highly motivated school staff who were able to command the experience and skills to manage change they served their purpose well. However, where they became imbedded in formal evaluation and assessment systems they tended to fail. Their reports were too defensive, they lacked rigour, and they were insufficiently critical, in an analytical sense. Further, they rarely tackled the important issues that related directly to the conditions of learning in classrooms, and were not particularly successful as a means of establishing a basis for continuing school development.

There has been a growing demand for greater accountability in school systems. Further, the management of public institutions now devolves responsibility for much of the day–to–day decisions to the operational units of the system. These two factors have resulted in increased demands for an effective system for improving and monitoring the performance of schools.

School development

Perhaps the primary problem of planned change in schools is the control of the implementation of development so that it achieves the objectives that are set for it. This requires that plans for development specify clear objectives and that schools are therefore clear about the particular outcomes in which they wish to achieve. For this reason it is recommend that the outcome statements in SDPs be written in a form that allows them to be readily verified. Monitoring is required in order to assess whether or not strategies are being implemented appropriately and to determine whether they are having the level of impact required in order to achieve the desired outcomes. In most cases operational adjustments in the implementation of strategies will amount to fine-tuning, although special circumstances may also generate the need to depart significantly from the plan.

Function of review

Review serves two functions in relation to change in schools. First, it provides information and support for the development process itself, and second it provides information for accountability purposes. Accountability is both a process and an outcome. It must assure the quality of outcomes, but it must also assure that the process required for the continuing achievement of outcomes is capable of doing so.

Internal review and assessment for development primarily serves a development purpose. However, the practice of internal review itself is part of the effective management of development in schools, therefore it contributes to a demonstration of accountability. It contributes to accountability through the assessment of progress towards stated objectives. The approval of SDPs is a further check in the system which primarily serves an accountability purpose. Monitoring the implementation of strategies is primarily development orientated, but because it involves the assessment of whether professional standards of practice are being upheld it contributes also to a demonstration of accountability.

Periodic external reviews of individual schools should be development orientated in that their task is to support the progress of schools towards the attainment of their stated objectives. However, they also contribute directly to the accountability of the system, particularly when they have a degree of independence from the operational structures of the system, conduct their work openly and report publicly.

External reviews of schools are an essential component in the evaluation of the systemic performance of programs and policies. They provide an assessment of the success of the system in meeting its publicly stated objectives.

Where reviews are conducted according to publicly stated criteria they serve accountability purposes, in addition to their contribution to development through the identification of factors responsible for the effectiveness of programs and policies. It is this dual focus on accountability and development that gives some recently developed review systems an explicit 'quality assurance' perspective beyond the 'inspection' focus of earlier external assessment functions in education (Cuttance, 1992a).

Internal review

Internal school reviews must raise awareness of the process of development and of progress and attainments in relation to the plan. They must strive for a critical and analytical perspective of progress and of the needs of the school. In addition to assessing the progress that the school has made, internal reviews must determine the development priorities for the school as its plan is rolled forward. That is, internal reviews are essentially formative in nature — they assess how far the development of the school has gone, and they analyse what is required for the next stage of development. Internal school reviews must address the fundamental processes and organisational structures most important to learning. In particular, they must address the issue of how development can achieve a direct impact on the quality of student learning. All other aspects of school activity and practice should be assessed primarily according to the support they provide for the quality of learning in the school.

Internal reviews must uncover the least effective practices of schools. This can be viewed from a perspective of the revision of priorities in a school. In many cases the least effective activities, in terms of the support they provide for learning, have become so, not because they have changed or are less capably carried out, but because they have become less relevant in the prevailing learning situation. Effective schools recognise their ineffective practices and take positive steps to discontinue them and free-up resources to support more effective practices and activities in the school.

School development requires specific professional skills: some related to the planning and management of change, and others determined by the substance of the strategies to be implemented. Schools need to review their training needs in this context and to provide those responsible for supporting and servicing them with information on their requirements. Training which is teacher–teacher based has been shown to be more effective than that centred around experts. The key to effective training is to involve individuals who are closely in touch with the day-to-day activities of schools. Effective classroom teachers, advisory teachers and district superintendents in the present system fit this model, but even wider use of cluster–groups of teachers may be profitable. This form of training and dissemination of knowledge is particularly appropriate to most activities associated with SDPs.

External review

The cycle of external reviews must be timed to facilitate the development and change process in schools. A five–year cycle has been found to be too long for this purpose. It is considered that three years is probably optimal in terms of the effective utilisation of resources, and in terms of its contribution to school development. The task of external review is to assess progress in terms of school's plans, to review the effectiveness of their consultative and planning processes and the management of development. Because the implementation of change itself impacts on the development process, external reviews must take account of the fact that objectives and implementation strategies will be adapted to local needs and conditions. Adaptation to local needs and conditions is important as it

increases the probability of acceptance and the success of system-wide programs and policies.

The task of external review, however, it not just to review individual schools, but also to provide information for evaluating the performance of the system as a whole. As indicated earlier, schools themselves work with the services and resources that are provided to them. It is, therefore, necessary to review the support structures for schooling and the effectiveness with which programs and policies are delivered to schools in order to evaluate the performance of the system.

The reports from external reviews of schools should be formulated through a process and written in a style which involves schools and contributes directly to their development. The information contained in a school reports should parallel effective practice in pupil assessment. That is, it should contain summative information, diagnostic information and formative information. Certain types of comparative information are also informative for development purposes.

Reviews of schools should be summative in the sense that they should assess the extent to which developments have achieved the stated objectives. Summative information provides a backdrop against which it is possible to compare the success of different strategies for development across schools.

The analysis of information in school reports must also be diagnostic. It should discuss aspects of school performance that require attention and suggest areas that require re-assessment in terms of both objectives and strategies. The diagnosis should also provide a basis for assessing the support that schools require for their development. Reports must also indicate where the development process in schools accords with effective management practice.

School reports should provide formative information which is constructive and helpful in relation to individual school plans. They should focus on the particular development aims of schools and indicate areas of process and functioning that schools need to address in the next stage of their development. Reports may also indicate appropriate targets for development.

Comparative information in school reports may be of two types. First, as indicated above, it may provide information on the success of different strategies for development across schools. Second, it may provide self–referenced information on the performance of individual schools. That is, the performance of schools in the present may be compared with their previous performance.

Comparative analyses across schools can also be useful provided they take account of the different circumstances of individual schools. For example, over the last decade a methodology has been developed for the comparative assessment of secondary schools in terms of student attainment in public examinations in the UK (Audit Commission, 1991; Cuttance, 1992b). These assessments should aim to take account of differences in the extent of social disadvantage in school intakes and of differences in the entry level attainments of students.

Reports from external reviews of schools must consider the audience for which they are written. In addition to the school community generally this will include those with formal responsibilities for the school—school staff, School Councils, regional directors, etc. The report must be written in an accessible language and in a positive tone in order to maximise the effectiveness of its contribution to development. It should convey the expectation of high achievement within the context of local conditions.

Reports from external school reviews provide an independent record based on criterion–referenced assessment of the performance and functioning of schools. Therefore, they provide a primary statement of the accountability of schools and of the system.

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